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ABSTRACT

The attempts of the employment community and education to develop the local school-to-work (STW) systems required by the 1994 School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) have generally failed to result in effective collaboration in the design and implementation of comprehensive STW systems. The first installment of a 5-year study of the STWOA found little evidence that STW partnerships, as they are currently constituted, will be a viable collaborative infrastructure for a comprehensive STW system over the long term. The individuals involved in drafting the STWOA should have paid more attention to the literature on the role of local industry-education councils/alliances in fostering school improvement and work force preparation during the past 30 years. That literature clearly demonstrates two things: the ineffectiveness of local work-education councils and the effectiveness of the Industry-Education Council model, which has been used extensively in planning and implementing career education during the past 3 decades. Individuals and groups involved in state and local STW initiatives must move beyond STW partnerships. They must do more to involve employers in STW, and they should begin accessing information and training from practitioners who have actually been involved in successful industry-education collaboration. (MN)

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American Association For Career Education

AACE Bonus Brief
Industry and Education Need to Establish A School-to-Work Infrastructure That Works

Donald M. Clark

The employment community and education have not, for the most part, achieved effective collaboration in the design and implementation of comprehensive school-to-work (STW) systems since the enactment of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994. They have attempted joint efforts through a local STW partnership structure required by the STWOA. However, this collaborative model is incapable, in my view, of substantive and sustainable STW system building.

More specifically, STW partnerships have not had a significant impact to date--in the aggregate--on setting STW standards; designing curricula and determining outcomes; providing experience for educators; helping to recruit other employers, particularly corporate chief executive officer or senior executive representatives; providing sufficient work-based learning opportunities; and in carrying out some of the connecting activities described in the STWOA.

The evaluation of the first installment of a 5-year study of the STWOA, *Partners in Progress: Early Steps in Creating School-to-Work Systems*, performed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., (MPR) cites the slow progress made in these and other areas of STW system building. The report leads one to conclude that there is little evidence that STW partnerships, as currently constituted, will be a viable collaborative type infrastructure in developing and implementing a comprehensive STW system over the long term.

One can assume that the federal STW legislation was drafted without undertaking a fairly intensive effort to gather information from the literature on industry-education councils/alliances in fostering school improvement and workforce preparation during the previous three decades. Instead, business-education partnerships were adopted as the mechanism for STW collaboration between the two sectors in the federal legislation without careful examination of their track record.

Studies conducted on the effectiveness of business-education partnerships prior to the enactment of the STWOA consistently pointed out that they had little, if any, impact on producing fundamental change in the educational system. Further, they rarely encompassed attempts to affect curriculum, the overall educational process, or the acquisition of basic skills. Nor had they significantly affected the dropout rate of participating students.

Those involved in drafting the STWOA should have reviewed the results of the Work-Education Consortium Project (WECP) launched in 1975, and funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Local Work-Education Councils (WEC) were promoted as the

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"new means to bring the world of work and institutions of education closer together" in improving youth's transition from school-to-work.

Four years later, researchers at ABT Associates in Cambridge, MA, didn't find any measurable impacts of the WECP councils. WECs, a product of federal seed money in workforce preparation, went out of business. Their efforts resembled the current state-of-the-practice in STW partnerships--trying to reinvent the wheel in employer-education collaboration.

Further, the information available on what works in establishing a coherent industry-education collaborative infrastructure that contributed to creating a comprehensive career education system in the 1970s and early 1980s was ignored in STW system building over the past three years. It could have benefited state and local STW staff and the employment community in hitting the road running rather than starting at square one in establishing an alliance between the two sectors.

The findings in the MPR report on STW implementation parallel studies describing the ineffectiveness of STW partnerships published in 1996. A Public/Private Venture study pointed out that "most employers have little knowledge of building an STW system in general and have shown little interest in the nitty-gritty mechanics of how an STW transition program should operate" particularly in work-based learning.

The National Center on the Education Quality of the Workforce (EQW) reported that its nationwide surveys of employers evidenced a growing disenchantment in business-education partnerships. The Center's EQW policy statement, *Connecting School and Work*, for example, stated that many business leaders entered partnerships with the best of intentions--but, by and large, "the accomplishments of these partnerships have been marginal and have not tackled the systemic problems in education."

Can the concept of STW partnership be supported financially and sustained as seed money funding under the STWOA declines and ends? On a scale of 1 to 10 used by television's McLaughlin Group, STW partnerships would probably rate a 2 in terms of their prospects for existing over the long term.

The September 1996 report to Congress on the implementation of the STWOA submitted by the U.S. Secretaries of Education and Labor concluded, like the MPR report, that "more must be done to involve employers" in STW. The alternative is for the employment community to continue its limited engagement with education, that is, "tinkering at the margin," which would have enormous consequences for furthering STW and school improvement.

Substantive collaboration in STW can be achieved through an infrastructure based on the Industry-Education Council model which was used extensively in planning and implementing career education during the previous three decades. Those involved in state and local STW initiatives, therefore, need to move beyond STW partnerships and get serious in accessing the information and training by practitioners, that is, those who "have been there," on industry-education collaboration that works for the benefit of both students and employers.

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